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BOOTSTRAPS UNLIMITED--ILLUSTRATING SPECIAL ASSISTANCE TO READERS IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

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A PROGRAM PROVIDING SPECIAL ASSISTANCE TO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL READERS IN BEAUMONT, TEXAS, IS DESCRIBED. THE ORGANIZATION AND MATERIALS FOR INSTRUCTION INCLUDE EXTENDED READINESS, BASAL INSTRUCTION, REMEDIATION IN GRADES 3, 4, 5, AND 6, AND CLINICAL INSTRUCTION. INSERVICE TRAINING, GRADING, EVALUATION AND PROBLEM AREAS ARE DISCUSSED. A SHORT BIBLIOGRAPHY OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS IS INCLUDED. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH CONFERENCE (HONOLULU, NOVEMBER 23-25, 1967). (BK)

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Illustrating Special Assistance to Readers in the Elementary School

by

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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BOOTSTRAPS UNLIMITED

Illustrating Special Assistance to Readers in the Elementary School

Some years ago I came to the conclusion that the crucial period in the education of a child lies in the beginning, the foundation years, of the elementary school. Any person who has looked into the faces of six year olds can tell you of all the wonderful secrets hidden there. There are life and energy in abundance. There are curiosity and eagerness for knowing. There are poetry and song in small hearts. There are creativity and adaptability in diminutive hands. There are trust and confidence, optimism and laughter; and most inspiring of all, there are mischief and merriment in twinkling eyes. We must sustain these characteristics through the years of growing, developing, and educating until these children reach adulthood. Then, we will surely produce individuals who can "become." In the elementary school our children must obtain the essential skills and sustain that wonderful eagerness for knowing in order that they be prepared to meet their needs for believing, working, and living in our great nation.

Did you ever watch an infant try to pick up a speck of sunshine? His hand closes firmly on the bright spot; but when he opens it, the brightness is gone. He is frustrated.

Perhaps he cries out in rage. Invariably, he soon turns away and moves on to other things. He has learned a lesson. He has learned that it is useless to spend one's time trying to pick up sunshine. Many of our elementary children learn the "sunshine" lesson when they are introduced to reading. A child usually approaches reading with enthusiasm. Too often, for one reason or another, he finds that it is useless to spend one's time trying to pick up that spot of sunshine called reading. He lacks confidence in his ability to accomplish this difficult task. How essential it is that a child retain his belief in himself! Each individual is what he is, because he believes that he can, or cannot do, what is expected of him.

Let us examine the conditions existing in the elementary schools of one school district in the spring of 1965. Standardized test results revealed that many of the students had serious reading difficulties. Careful observation disclosed areas of weakness in teaching practices and organization for instruction. It was decided that plans for improvement would focus on the following critical areas:

1. Thirty-eight percent of the students were negro. Most of these children were from families existing on very low incomes and whose experiential and educational backgrounds were disadvantaged.

2. Many beginning children were introduced to reading without regard for their experiential backgrounds or their readiness for school.

3. Textbooks, in many of the schools, were distributed on the basis of enrollment by grades. Students were required to use textbooks written at grade level regardless of the student's achievement level.

4. Many students were leaving elementary school poorly prepared, or totally unprepared, to read books and materials commonly used in the secondary schools.

5. Standardized tests revealed that the number of disabled students was growing larger as each group of students progressed to the next grade.

6. Teaching practices revealed much emphasis upon oral reading, especially in the primary grades. This emphasis, along with the "class as a whole" method, brought about the omission of word identification, reference, interpretive, and study skills. In addition, the neglect of the individual and his needs was causing frustration in retarded readers and placing restrictions upon the gifted.

Obviously, a remedial program was essential. The two reading clinics in the district were inadequate to care for all the needs. Reorganization and detailed planning were necessary. We resolved to meet the needs of our disabled readers with classes designed to identify needs and remedy

them on as nearly an indivisual basis as possible. In addition, we resolved to strengthen our organization for instruction and improve our teaching practices. This, we felt, would minimize our future problems.

Such a program has required the cooperation of students, parents, teachers, and administration. Implementation has been slow and tedious. Constant evaluation and revision have been necessary. All indications lead us to believe that South Park Independent School District, Beaumont, Texas is making real progress in preparing students to "become." We invite you to take a look at the program for special assistance in our elementary schools.

ORGANIZATION AND MATERIALS FOR INSTRUCTION

Extended Readiness. Readiness tests are given to all six year olds entering first grade. Children are grouped for instruction. The grouping is planned to cut down the range of abilities within one classroom. However, each teacher is given a class with a broad enough range in abilities that it may not be referred to as the "dumb" class or the "gifted."

The first year's program has been arranged into six levels, or phases. These phases are prereadiness, reading readiness, preprimer, primer, first reader, and wide reading. The readiness test scores and teacher judgment are used to place children in the levels best fitted to their individual

readiness levels. Children may enter the program at any level. Progress is dependent upon individual maturity and ability. Plans for the future are to extend the phases or levels through the first three years into a nongraded primary.

The prereadiness phase of the program is structured to increase the child's language facility, his number understandings, his literary and art appreciation, and his listening skills. He is given opportunity to tell stories and experiences, to memorize poetry and rhymes, to extend his experience through field trips, to express himslef through a variety of art media and through music and rhythms. Experience charts are used to introduce him to words and sounds before he begins to read and write.

At the end of the first year some children will have completed all six phases of the program. Others may finish the first year of school at the preprimer stage in their reading development. Children will begin the second year of school where they left off the year before.

Reporting for the first and third marking periods will be done through parent-teacher conferences. Teachers are encouraged to minimize the importance of grades and the grade structure and to emphasize the value of individual progress. In this manner, we hope to insure continuous achievement during the first school years.

Basal Instruction. Classes for basal instruction are organized to provide for each child at his own instructional level. In order to do this, it will be necessary to take certain steps which may insure success. First, textbooks must be distributed as the children's needs indicate. Second, teachers must make good use of test results and informal reading inventories to identify problems and instructional levels. Third, children must be given materials and workbooks designed to be used with the basal which seems most appropriate to the child. Fourth, children's learning must be reinforced, at each level of attainment, with additional basals, supplementary, and trade books in order that they reach proficiency before proceeding to the next level.

Remediation in Grades Three and Four. Early assistance seems important. This remedial work is designed to supplement the basal program. The classroom teacher will continue to teach the child with the basal most suited to his instructional level. The remedial teacher's job is to assist the child who is reading below grade level in a skills program of perceptual training, phonic and structural analysis, vocabulary building, some guided reading, and literature appreciation.

Teachers are provided with Tachist-O-Film materials used to promote quick word identification and spelling, vis-

uals for teaching phonics and structural analysis on the overhead projector, SRA Reading Laboratories, Readers Digest Skill Builders on several grade levels, filmstrips and recordings. A good selection of additional books are provided by the school library.

Remediation for Grades Five and Six. With these older boys and girls we are using two approaches for the correction of their difficulties. Among the culturally disadvantaged there are a number of students who read so poorly that they are discouraged and seldom try to read anything. These students can sometimes read first or second grade materials. More often they can hardly be described as reading at all. Another group of students are reading below grade level. However, this group is able to make good progress with books and other written materials if they have special help. For these two groups of students we offer:

1. The EDL Reading 100 Program. This is a program designed for illiterate adults. It begins with reading readiness and moves upward in a developmental sequence. This is a laboratory class using machines. This machine program offers a new and interesting way of learning to a group of children who reject books. Children who feel they will never learn to read can begin all over with this new way of teaching reading.

2. Multi-level Materials. Fifth and sixth grade students often reject basals written for younger children. This program offers materials written at high interest with low reading level. Five levels of materials are placed in each room. Two teachers are assigned to each class. Each teacher assumes responsibility for from twelve to fourteen students. The teachers alternate with each other in teaching aloud. At other times, the teacher works quietly with individuals. Students can move through the materials at their own rates. Materials used with this group are the American Adventure Series, Webster Practice Readers, Readers Digest Skill Builders, SRA Reading Laboratories, SRA Pilot Libraries, Phonics in Proper Perspective, overhead visuals for teaching word identification, dictionaries, tape recordings of good literature.

Teachers are encouraged to identify individual needs and to maintain balance in planning their work.

Clinical Instruction. The district operates two reading clinics for students with serious disabilities. Students are referred to the clinics when their needs cannot be met in the classroom. They receive meticulous diagnosis and individual instruction by trained clinicians.

IN-SERVICE TRAINING

Our remedial teachers have received much of their specific training in the in-service program of our school

district. It seems impossible to find trained remedial teachers. We are fortunate enough to find teachers who are willing to be trained for the job. The training program has attempted to focus on the following:

1. The Student and His Needs. Much can be done for the student who understands his problems and who believes in his own ability to achieve his objectives. The children in the remdial reading program have met with failure so often that they are convinced that they cannot learn. Teachers are urged to study their pupils and to begin by improving their self-images. Reading improvement comes with confidence. Teachers often need assistance in understanding these pupils and in accepting them.

2. Diagnosis and Placement. Teachers are given practice in the use of informal reading inventories, phonics surveys, word lists, and standardized tests for the identication of problems. Flexible grouping is encouraged.

3. Use of Materials. Many of the materials are unfamiliar to the teachers, and special instruction in their use is most important. In the program using multi-level materials, organization of these materials into a sequential plan is often a real chore. In the Learning 100 Program, the teacher must learn to operate the machines as well as to understand the sequence of the materials.

4. Keeping Records. Instruction in the keeping of

records and the development of record forms for recording student progress has been a part of the in-service training. Records on student progress are kept and passed on to the next teacher.

5. Organization for Instruction. Teachers are given assistance in planning to cover all areas in reading as well as an orderly daily program. They are urged to involve each student in planning and evaluating his reading development.

GRADING AND REPORTING

Grading and reporting student progress has caused much concern and discussion. Teachers are disturbed because children below grade level must be given grades. How can a child maintain a satisfactory self-image when he receives "F" each grading period? There is some feeling that it is unfair to other children to give remedial pupils passing grades for work done below grade level. After much discussion, we have agreed that all children who are making progress, whether or not it is on grade level, are entitled to passing grades.

The parent-teacher conference is a most satisfactory method of reporting. It is sometimes difficult to get parents of these children to come to the school for a conference. As the image of the school improves in the minds of the children it improves in the minds of the parents. More and more parents are coming to the school, and better understanding is possible for both teachers and parents.

EVALUATION

Measuring results of any educational program is difficult. Standardized test scores indicate great progress for many of these pupils and little progress for others. That these children do not test well is well known. Questionnaires have contributed some information. These indicate that many of those who continue to test low in reading are now able to operate in the regular classroom. Teachers of reading report that there are fewer discipline problems and less absenteeism. Students seem generally pleased with their own progress and are less antagonistic toward school. Principals are enthusiatic and anxious to continue the project. Teachers, other than reading teachers, tell us they are beginning to notice differences in attitude and application. Many of these same teachers are now conferring with the reading teachers in order to secure reading materials appropriate to their students. They, also, report the use of many audio-visual aids in presenting their subject-matter as an effort to reach the poor reader. These evidences of change in our students, teachers, and principals are qratifying.

PROBLEMS

Management of the over-all project has presented some problems. Building a good self-image, in these pupils, is involved. Reading teachers, alone cannot be successful. They require assistance from all the faculty. There are a few

teachers who are still demanding that these poor readers operate at grade level in order to receive passing grades. The effort to keep interest high is a strain on the reading teachers. They require much encouragement and direction in teaching and motivating their pupils.

CONCLUSIONS

Elementary school children can and should be given help in reading. Remedial reading has its pitfalls. We must eradicate the stigma attached to those who require help in reading. Assistance must begin early; aid to the preschool and first year children seems part of the answer. Less emphasis upon grade level teaching and grade level textbooks will permit better teaching. Children progress at different rates. Our talk of individualized instruction must become a reality.

Most important, we must give these children the means of helping themselves. Teachers can show children how to learn, but each individual must learn for himself. In Texas a man's success story is sometimes described with the old cliche, "He has pulled himself up by his bootstraps." An individual, by his own effort, must derive meaning from printed symbols. Anger and frustration are self-defeating. If we can provide assistance, encouragement, and good self-images for our children we can surely call our project "Bootstraps Unlimited!"

APPENDIX

Reading Programs

EDL Reading 100	Educational Developmental Laboratories Division of McGraw-Hill Book Company Huntington, New York
SRA Reading Laboratories SRA Pilot Libraries	Science Research Associates, Inc. 259 East Erie Street Chicago, Ill.
Tachisto-film Materials	Learning Through Seeing, Inc. Sunland, California

Books

Betts, Emmett A. American Adventure Series. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1956-67.

Groves, Charles C. and Donald Anderson. Webster Practice Readers. Manchester, Missouri: Webster Division of McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1961.

Heilman, Arthur W. Phonics in Proper Perspective. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrell Books, Inc., 1964.

Readers' Digest Educational Division (ed.) Readers' Digest Skill Builders. Pleasantville, New York: Readers' Digest Services, Inc., 1958-60.